

European Communities

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

1984-1985

2 April 1984

DOCUMENT 1-47/84

Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Youth, Culture,
Education, Information and Sport

on the activity of certain new religious movements within
the European Community

Rapporteur: Mr R. COTTRELL

PE 82.322/fin.
Or. De.

At its sittings of 19 April and 10 June 1982 respectively, the European Parliament referred the motions for a resolution by Mr BALFE on the activities of the Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (Doc. 1-109/82) and by Mrs WIECZOREK-ZEUL and others on distress caused by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (Doc. 1-2/82) to the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport as the committee responsible and to the Legal Affairs Committee for an opinion.

On 28 September 1982 the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport appointed Mr COTTRELL rapporteur.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 18/19 January, 16/17 March, 25/26 April and 4 November 1983, 25/26 January, 29 February/1 March and 20/21 March 1984.

In considering the draft report, the committee bore in mind the many submissions made to it by organizations and individuals involved in the area of new religious movements.

The committee adopted the motion for a resolution at its meeting of 20 and 21 March 1984 by thirteen votes to none with one abstention.

The following took part in the vote : Mr BEUMER, chairman; Mr FAJARDIE and Mr HAHN, vice-chairmen; Mr COTTRELL, rapporteur; Mr ALEXIADIS, Mr BOCKLET (Deputizing for Mr PEDINI), Mr BORD (deputizing for Mr GERONIMI), Miss BROOKES, Mrs CINCIARO RODANO (deputizing for Mr FANTI), Mrs GAIOTTI DE BIASE, Mr GEROKOSTOPOULOS, Mr ROLLAND, Mr SIMMONDS and Mrs VIEHOFF.

The opinion of the Legal Affairs Committee is attached, in the form of a letter.

The report was tabled on 23 March 1984.

The deadline for tabling amendments to this report will be indicated in the draft agenda for the part-session at which it will be debated.

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A

The Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution together with explanatory statement :

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on the activity of certain new religious movements within the European Community

The European Parliament,

- accepting the principle laid down in Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,
 - having regard to the Treaty of Rome and in particular Article 220 thereof,
 - having regard to International Youth Year 1985,
 - having regard to the motions for resolutions on :
 - distress caused by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (Doc. 1-2/82),
 - the activities of the Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (Doc. 1-109/82),
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport (Doc.) and the opinion of the Legal Affairs Committee,
- A. having regard to the concern felt by individuals and families in the Community at the activities of certain organizations described as 'new religious movements' insofar as their practices infringe human and civil rights and are detrimental to the position in society of those affected;
- B. stressing that full freedom of religion and opinion is a principle in the Member States and that the Community Institutions therefore have no right to judge the value of either religious beliefs in general or individual religious practices;
- C. convinced that in this instance, the validity of religious beliefs is not in question, but rather the lawfulness of the practices used to recruit new members and the treatment they receive;
- D. whereas the problems arising from the emergence of certain 'new religious movements' have attained world-wide dimensions, occurring in all Member

States, although to different degrees, and having already prompted investigations, government action and court judgments in various Member States;

- E. whereas the abandonment of their previous way of life by the members of these movements raises social issues and issues connected with labour law, adversely affecting not only the individuals involved, but also the community and the social system;
1. Considers it necessary for the Councils of Ministers responsible, that is to say the Ministers of the Interior and Ministers of Justice meeting in European Political Cooperation, and the Council of Ministers for Social Affairs, to hold an exchange of information as soon as possible on the problems arising from the activity of certain new religious movements with particular reference to the following areas :
- (a) procedure applied in conferring charity status and tax exemption on such movements;
 - (b) compliance with the laws of the individual Member States, for example labour law and social security legislation;
 - (c) consequences for society of failure to comply with these laws;
 - (d) attempts to find missing persons and the possibilities of cooperation with third countries for this purpose;
 - (e) ways in which the rights of members to personal freedom are infringed;
 - (f) creation of centres to assist those leaving these organizations by providing legal aid and assistance to reintegrate into society and find employment;
 - (g) existence of legal loopholes owing to the differences in legislation in the individual countries which enable proscribed activities to be pursued from one country in another;
2. Considers it necessary to apply the following criteria in assessing these 'new religious movements' :
- (a) persons under the age of majority should not be induced on becoming a member of a movement to make a solemn long-term commitment that will determine the course of their lives;
 - (b) there should be an adequate period of reflection on the financial or personal commitment involved;
 - (c) after joining an organization contacts must be allowed with family and friends;
 - (d) members who have already commenced a course of education must not be prevented from completing it;

(e) the following rights of the individual must be respected :

- the right to leave a movement unhindered;
- the right to contact family and friends in person or by letter and telephone;
- the right to seek independent advice, legal or otherwise;
- the right to seek medical attention at any time;

(f) no-one may be incited to break any law, particularly with regard to fund-raising, for example by begging or prostitution;

(g) movements may not extract permanent commitments from potential recruits, for example students or tourists, who are visitors to a country in which they are not resident;

(h) during recruitment, the name and principles of the movement should always be made immediately clear;

(i) such movements must inform the competent authorities on request of the address or whereabouts of individual members;

(j) new religious movements must ensure that individuals dependent on them and working on their behalf receive the social security benefits provided in the Member States in which they live or work;

(k) if a member travels abroad in pursuit of the interests of a movement, it must accept responsibility for bringing the individual home, especially in the event of illness;

(l) telephone calls and letters from members' families must be immediately passed on to them;

(m) where recruits have children, movements must do their utmost to further their education and health, and avoid any circumstances in which the children's well-being might be at risk;

3. Calls on the Commission :

- to submit a compilation of data, if necessary using a data bank, on the international ramifications of new religious movements, including those using cover names and front organizations, and on their activities in the Member States specifically indicating the measures taken by government bodies, especially the police and the courts, in response to infringements of the law by these movements, as well as the findings of government commissions of investigation into certain new religious movements;
- to submit proposals to the Councils of Ministers responsible with a view to securing the effective protection of Community citizens;

4. Invites the Councils of Ministers responsible to discuss, on the basis of the Commission's data and proposals for action, the problems arising from the activities of the said movements, thereby enabling the Member States to cooperate with each other, if possible on the basis of Article 220 of the Treaty of Rome, in protecting the rights of their citizens;
5. Considers, moreover, a common approach within the context of the Council of Europe to be desirable and calls, therefore, on the governments of the Member States to press for appropriate agreements to be drawn up by the Council of Europe which will guarantee the individual effective protection from the machinations of these movements and their physical and moral coercion;
6. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and Council of the European Communities, to the Governments and national parliaments of the Member States, and to the Council of Europe.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENTINTRODUCTION

- 1.1 One of the remarkable social developments in the past decade has been the explosive growth of what have generally become known as the 'new religious movements'. This is a term which academic researchers prefer to that of 'religious cults and sects'. The author recognises that both phrases are inadequate and faced, in the course of his inquiries, with organisations whose numbers run into treble figures, and whose origins and motives are equally varied, has decided to use the general working description of 'new religious movements'. Most of these movements base their appeal to potential recruits on a philosophy which suggests that formal or traditionally-inspired religions have failed in their task and society requires a different approach. The movements often contain an oriental or exotic flavour and some are either 'imports' from Asia, or variants - some might say mutants - of oriental philosophy. A major growth centre has been the United States: of America (California is a notable example) and from there these new movements spread inexorably to Europe.
- 1.2 Concern about the nature and activities of these organisations has proved about equal to their rate of growth. Almost all have inspired controversy in one form or another, with accusations of fraud and other fiscal improprieties common and, in the social sphere, frequent criticism on the grounds of causing distress within families and psychological harm to recruits.
- 1.3 Considerable academic study is now being devoted to the phenomenon of these movements and work now under way, for instance, in the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark is likely to contribute a great deal to knowledge about the movements and the response to their growth from society. In the meantime, governments in all Member States of the European Community - and others beyond Community frontiers - are increasingly under pressure to develop a response within a legislative framework, something which is exceedingly difficult to do given the fundamental necessity of democracy to co-exist with a multiplicity of ideals and beliefs, no matter how remarkable, strange or eccentric they may seem to the majority.

- 1.4 Your author is not concerned in this document with the legitimacy of belief and feels it hardly necessary to state clearly that beliefs of a religious nature are personal, and beyond the realm of intervention by systems of government. Nothing in this document, or in the motion for a resolution, proposes controls or regulations on belief. What your rapporteur does address himself to are what might be best described as the secular consequences of involvement with some, though by no means all, of what are sometimes known as the 'new religious movements'.
- 1.5 Perhaps the most startling example of concern to date was the mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana, where some 900 followers of one self-appointed prophet poisoned themselves. The spectacle of bloated corpses of men, women, children, even their pets, shocked the world. An American Congressman who had flown to the settlement to investigate reports of ill-treatment and virtual imprisonment was himself murdered. The cult had earlier moved away from the USA to South America after claiming 'persecution' - a not infrequent defence by many of these movements in response to questioning from any source of their motives or integrity.
- 1.6 This report was drawn up following the receipt by the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport of a number of critical motions dealing with the activities of the Unification Church - often known as the 'Moonies', after their founder, a Korean, Sun Myong Moon. In recent years the Unification Church has rarely been away from the public spotlight. Its controversial recruitment techniques - known to researchers as 'love bombing' - have led to extraordinary family tug-of-wars, in which parents have been known to resort to the services of professional kidnappers and then indulge in an activity known as 'deprogramming' in order to break the apparent dependence of recruits upon the Unification Church. Such activities cannot be condoned. That they should evidently flourish in connection with the Unification Church is however a remarkable statement in itself, although the use of 'kidnappers' and 'deprogrammers' is not confined to adherents of the UC. Much has been written, critical and otherwise, of the Unification Church. The Fraser Report - an inquiry by the US Congress into American-Korean relations - devoted a third of its considerable length to the development of what it described as the "Moon organisation", examining in depth, for example, the allegations that it was involved at times with the Korean CIA and arms manufacture. In the USA, Mr Moon has

himself been convicted, pending appeal, of substantial tax evasion charges. In the United Kingdom, the British section of the Church was involved in a protracted and expensive legal battle with a national newspaper, the Daily Mail, which accused it of breaking up families. The newspaper won. At Besançon in France, national attention was focused on the case of a young Moonie recruit 'kidnapped' by her parents who then received the attention of professional deprogrammers. In this case the daughter took legal action against her parents. Again in the UK, the Attorney-General proposed to the Charity Commissioners that the charity status of two UC organisations should be removed, action that the Commissioners felt was beyond their brief to take. Before the recent general election, the matter was referred by the Attorney-General to the High Court. Former adherents of the UC have written books testifying that they had become, following recruitment, virtual automatons, tramping the streets for long hours each day in search of money with which to feed the movement. Not all comment on the UC takes such a critical path. Eileen Barker, of the London School of Economics, has made a number of close studies of the Unification Church and in discussions with your rapporteur declared that it was often the victim of colourful reporting in the popular press, which missed a wider content in the movement's philosophy. Similar views were received by the author from other academic sources, but as he has already declared, it is not the legitimacy of belief with which either he or the European Parliament are concerned.

- 1.7 It would be impossible to list every movement which has been drawn to the author's attention in terms of critical comment, but what is clear is that many of the complaints about their activities take a similar form. Parents write of losing contact with their sons and daughters for years: some vanish altogether. Others, on their infrequent visits to family homes, seem strange and distant and reluctant to stay. There are accusations that recruits are virtually brainwashed into dependence on a new faith - for example, by control of diet; isolation from parents, friends and outside contact of all forms; disturbed sleeping patterns, being awoken at irregular hours to chant, sing and 'pray'. This, it is claimed, is nothing more than a process of indoctrination which leads to total subservience to a movement and its controllers and creates a willingness to obey.

1.8 This leads naturally to a discussion of recruitment techniques.

In most of the cases which I have examined, it is the young who appear most attracted. The prime ages appear to be 18 - 25, with a heavy concentration of recruits among those who are entering their middle and later years at university. Most come from stable families of traditional background, where there is generally an acceptance of Christian belief of some kind. There rarely seem to be financial or marital problems within the family. Most recruits appear to demonstrate a healthy idealism naturally common to the young and a willingness to consider and discuss new ideas. There is a general sense of care for the future of the world and its problems, and often a growing sense of doubt regarding established and traditional approaches to political and social problems. Many have begun to ponder seriously their own futures in a world which seems increasingly less secure.

1.9 Much appears to depend on the recruitment techniques. Quite often those who are approached are alone and that approach is conducted by a group, the latter involving the so-called 'love bombing' technique. This often applies to young people travelling abroad, either alone or in pairs. There is an approach offering something like a "meal at an international centre with friends", or "are you lonely, and would you like to come and spend an evening with some young people just like you?" Rarely at this stage will there be mention of the real hosts, or the organisation, which are gradually revealed after a subtle process of introduction. These sentiments have been expressed in letters to me . . . "We never really knew - they just seemed so nice and they only wanted to help." Recruits in the USA speak of being asked to stay on, to visit and stay at a ranch, to work among the poor and the handicapped. But, as soon as loyalty is judged complete, the new recruits find instead that they are tramping the streets, seeking money and more recruits, for which so many of these movements demonstrate an endless appetite. University careers and hopes for the future are often forgotten and abandoned, sometimes - among the older recruits - homes and families, too. Occasionally, entire families are drawn into this complicated web of entanglement, creating special concern for the very young who are unable to make their own judgments or react to what is happening to their parents.

2.1 Common to many of the movements is a suspicious desire to insulate new recruits from family, friends or anyone who might threaten to break the spell of involvement. This includes traditional medical

treatment, since illness is often proclaimed by gurus and prophets at the centre of certain movements to be a punishment for misdemeanour or worse, betrayal. Another recruitment technique - apparently and hopefully unique to a particularly pernicious movement known as the 'Children of God' - openly involves sexual lures, with young female recruits acting the role of prostitutes. The Children of God openly describe this repellant activity as 'flirty fishing' - part of a revolting manual of behaviour which includes the incitement of child abuse, clearly in breach of laws in every Member State and, of course, all civilised communities.

2.2 Degradation of the human being can be the natural result of such activities. The following quotation from a young English girl who joined the Children of God is instructive. She met a young man collecting money in a major Scottish city and visited a café with him. "He said God wanted His followers to drop out of society and give up working for money . . . he told me it would mean giving up my degree course at University . . . If I did express any doubts, he had an answer for me, backed either by the Bible or the writings of COG's prophet, Moses David . . . I forsook my parents and relatives and looked on them only as flesh-people to draw me back to my old ways . . . We lived on left-over food given to us by supermarkets and also asked for donations of money when out on the streets." That young lady has now left the movement after experiences she deeply regrets and has returned to university studies.

2.3 The shocking code of the Children of God is not, thankfully, repeated among any of the other organisations which the author has studied. Clearly existing laws in the Member States ought to be sufficient to control such a movement without any recourse to new legislation, although your rapporteur fears that the respective national authorities may not have sufficiently appreciated the threat posed by this organisation. Although it remains small, its potential for harm - particularly in regard to many publications involving illegal sexual activity and anti-semitic statements by its leader, Moses David - outweigh the size of membership, insofar as 'membership' is actually possible to define.

2.4 Another kind of movement is that which devotes its attention to the provision of courses which are aimed at the expansion of the abilities of the mind. Many have what is best described as a mystical

approach and some involve unusual behaviour in groups, in order to 'release' deeper understanding or comprehension. These programmes are often complex and many have written to me to say that they have derived great satisfaction and enrichment from them. Of course fees are involved. The Church of Scientology, founded by the American, L. Ron Hubbard, according to a personally-evolved philosophy, charges from £300 to £3,000 for courses at various levels and attracts a world-wide clientele to its centres in the European Community, notably that at East Grinstead, in the United Kingdom. Mr Hubbard's movement has also attracted critics and one correspondent, describing her daughter's involvement, wrote to me to describe large sums of money being borrowed from a bank to "pay for courses" - which was eventually repaid from a legacy. "But what of other folk - either lonely, misguided or weak, who have no such legacies and are gently persuaded to part with their money with the promise that they will become better and more positive people?" At one time, a former UK Government sought to restrict the right of entry of senior Scientologists to the United Kingdom, a restriction which has been lifted although discussion about Scientology and 'dianetics' continues. At East Grinstead I saw people who attested to their happiness and satisfaction with Scientology. Subsequently, however, I was told of people being 'door-stepped' in a London street, invited to take a test involving a piece of apparatus known as the 'E meter' and then offered courses since the results revealed the need for improvement. A letter received told the story of a young man who heard about 'Dianetics' on Radio Luxembourg and having visited Scientology's centre in Birmingham was advised of his need for 'treatment' at £10 an hour. Subsequently he went into debt to the extent of £240 and was, it was claimed, 'completely brain-washed'.

- 2.5 Scientology in the United States has recently experienced turmoil, with claims that L Ron Hubbard had either vanished or was dead. His son tried, unsuccessfully, to prove the latter in court. Mr Hubbard is now said not to be formally associated with the movement but in March 1982 was still writing to defend the movement from critics. The "mighty Interpol, that tool of the CIA", had been found, he declared, to be a nest of war criminals hiding out from the law itself" although "you do not hear much about this from the running dog press because of course they were the tool of the enemy in the first place". Mr Hubbard seems much preoccupied with enemies, presumably of Scientology: "All you have to do is to count the memberships of the Churches. And you know conclusively that while the enemy goes down, whatever the bombast, Scientology is going UP."

2.6. An example of a major 'meditational movement', known quite often as 'Rajneesh' (after its founder, Shree Bhagwan Rajneesh) and, sometimes as the 'orange folk', has major centres throughout Europe particularly in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Close followers are known as Sannyasins. The founder left a substantial community established in Poona, India, in 1981 and settled in the United States, where an orange colony grew up in Oregon to be followed by one hundred more throughout that country and Canada. He has appealed against efforts by the US authorities to deport him. The movement offers meditational courses of various kinds and at various fees. Some are controversial because of what is known as the 'tantric' element, in which sexual liberation is important and apparently frank. That is a private matter and not for comment in a report of this kind. The concerns brought to your author's attention deal only with such secular matters as allegations of personality change, of recruits being asked to hand over all possessions and wealth and of difficulties experienced by members visiting the original centre in Poona with regard to illness and sickness. Naturally there are testimonials received by the author supporting the work of Rajneesh and the enthusiasm of Sannyasins with whom the author and his staff have been in contact is not doubted.

2.7 Perhaps one of the best known movements because of its high profile in public activity is the International Society of Krishna Consciousness - 'Hare Krishna' for short, of young recruits often heard chanting those words in many of Europe's towns and cities as they parade about in saffron robes, hair shorn, beating drums. Recruits - almost always young - live and worship together in a close communal life, forsaking personal wealth and possessions. Much activity is devoted to fund-raising, usually through the street selling of books and records. 'Hare Krishna' - though entirely different in concept - has been the subject of similar criticisms made of the Unification Church, namely that recruits abandon their families and are subjected to 'mind dependence' behaviour such as lack of sleep, control of diet, leading to disorientation, and sublimation of personality. There have been accounts of kidnappers and de-programmers at work with members of this movement.

CONCLUSIONS

- 2.8 A notable feature of many of the 'new religious movements' is the bitter and hostile reaction to criticism, nearly always represented as an attack on religious freedom or simply freedom of belief. Litigation is a frequent weapon. The Fraser Committee of Inquiry in the USA reported: "Many people with information about the Moon Organisation expressed fear that they would be harassed with law suits if they spoke to the sub-committee. This fear resulted in part from the perception that the UC has unlimited financial resources to pursue legal actions, frivolous or otherwise, against any person or organisation threatening it."
- 2.9 There have been many important studies which attempt to resolve the conflict between protection of the completely legitimate right to belief and the equally legitimate right of cause for concern as to the consequences of those beliefs. Most significant is that conducted for the Government of Ontario in June, 1980. Mr Hill wrote: "In the study's view there is no doubt that mass madness and group paranoia are a possibility wherever certain factors - charismatic leadership, financial adherence to a cause, a real or imagined threat from outside - come together. And it is clear that society is at risk when groups with such factors have mass followings or any significant measures of social or political influence." But equally, the study concluded that in effect the freedom for people to associate together in an open society conveys the risk of suffering as the result of that association and, in a last work, said these important words ..."The Government must resist devising rules which in their breach and in their broad discretion contain dangers which we as individuals in a free society cannot abide."
- 3.1 Are, then, existing safeguards sufficient, or should new measures be proposed? In the most part, your author believes that existing legal measures are sufficient in each Member State. What is required is the development of an atmosphere of what might be described as co-existence. Where any movement becomes obnoxious or threatening to society - the Children of God providing a clear example - the authorities can and must react swiftly using the laws they already possess. For other concerns, we are dealing not with any attempt to proscribe or control religious belief or indeed the privacy of belief but with matters of human rights.

If individuals become social and mental wrecks through the result of involvement, should society turn its back? : if people are parted from their sons, daughters or family and friends, can that be ignored? Equally if they are parted from their money or property as the result of misrepresentation or false promises, can there be no response that will prove adequate?

- 3.2 In the motion for a resolution, the author has identified a possible alternative approach which avoids the obvious pitfalls of restrictive and unacceptable legislation. It is true that the proposal for the harmonisation of tax exemption and charity status throughout the European Community has a legislative impact: but it is not directed solely at the new religious movements or indeed, movements of any religious profession whatsoever. The work of charity covers a much wider field and would be assisted by a legally harmonious statute covering the membership of the Community and should not be seen as a restrictive proposal.
- 3.3 The most important part of the motion for a resolution is that suggesting a system of "voluntary guidelines". There is no doubt in the mind of the author that phenomenon though they may be, the new religious movements, and their variants, will remain a strong feature of the social landscape. It is ultimately therefore a question of equal co-existence. The thrust of this explanatory document and of the motion for a resolution lies wholly at the prospect of integration within society and honest respect by these new movements for the freedoms which we confer upon them: at protection of human rights which are enshrined without question at every other level of society and every other area of public activity: and at the need to desperately avoid, as Daniel Hill wrote, other proposals which "we as individuals in a free society cannot abide."

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

DOCUMENT 1-2/82

tabled by Mrs WIECZOREK-ZEUL, Lord DOURO, Mrs BUCHAN, Mr BOCKLET, Mrs RABBETHGE, Mrs VIEHOFF, Mr IRMER and Mr BEUMER

for entry in the register

pursuant to Rule 49 of the Rules of Procedure

on distress caused by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church

The European Parliament,

- deeply concerned by the distress and family break-ups caused by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church,

1. Welcomes the media's relentless exposure of the Moonies' activities;
2. Urges public authorities throughout the Community to ensure that the Moonies are not given special tax benefits, charity status, or other privileges;
3. Calls on its Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport to report on the activities of Sun Myung Moon's followers in the Unification Church and the danger to society that they represent;
4. Asks the European Parliament - US Congress Delegation to raise the problem of the Moonies at their next meeting;
5. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the Foreign Ministers.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

DOCUMENT 1-109/82

tabled by Mr R. BALFE

pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure

on the activities of the Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church

The European Parliament,

- deeply concerned by the distress and family break-ups caused by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church,

1. Welcomes the media's relentless exposure of the Moonies' activities;
2. Urges public authorities throughout the Community to ensure that the Moonies are not given special tax benefits, charity status, or other privileges;
3. Calls on its Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport to report on the activities of Sun Myung Moon's followers in the Unification Church and the danger to society that they represent;
4. Asks the European Parliament-US Congress Delegation to raise the problem of the Moonies at their next meeting;
5. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the Foreign Ministers.

Opinion of the Legal Affairs Committee

Letter from the chairman of the committee to Mr BEUMER, chairman of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport

Dear Mr Beumer,

At its meeting of 21 February 1984, the Legal Affairs Committee heard Mr COTTRELL, a rapporteur of your committee, speak at length on the activity of certain 'new religious movements' within the European Community.

It shares the legitimate concern expressed by the rapporteur and in the legal sphere it fully endorses the reference made to Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

This article provides an adequate legal framework for a Community solution to the problem raised, since it guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of thought and religious belief, whilst specifying the limits which may have to be put on this right if the freedom and safety of human beings are at risk.

Proceeding from this premise, it is also desirable and legally correct to develop political cooperation and try to find whatever kind of agreement may help to prevent acts which jeopardize human freedom, especially the freedom of young people.

The text of this letter, drafted by Mr Vié, draftsman of the opinion, was unanimously¹ approved by the Legal Affairs Committee at its meeting of 1 and 2 March 1984.

Yours sincerely,

Simone VEIL, Chairman

¹ The following members were present: Mrs Veil, chairman; Mr Vié, draftsman of the opinion; Mr D'Angelosante, Mr De Gucht, Mr Ephremidis, Mr Gontikas, Mr Malangré, Mr Prout, Mr Sieglerschmidt, Mr Tyrrell and Mr Vetter.

